MADELINE'S SELFISHNESS

By MARAVENE KENNEDY

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Her indolent grace irritated Harding. Even her serene, audacious loveliness found no favor in his eyes today. Her big, gray eyes looked out from under the sweeping lashes mockingly.

"Your silence means that I am going to be scolded shortly. Don't. I may mistake your interest and think you're in love with me. With all your wisdom and recondite philosophy you're only thirty-one, you know."

Harding reddened uncomfortably.

"If you only would fall in love with me!" she wheedled. "Think how it would develop your character to put the tender emotion underfoot! And how instructive to me to see your convolutions, to know that not even love could make you condone my indolence and selfishness!"

"And your conceit," he added caustically. "I'm thinking of my own affairs, not yours, unfortunately." A sudden weariness smote his eyes. "Madeline, I shall have to make an assignment and go out of business. Rob's failure has involved me deeply. Could I pay Mercer I could pull through, but I can't raise even $1,000 with the other claims against the stock. Money is very close now. I shall have to go to the city and take a position for awhile unless"—

"When do you assign?" she interrupted calmly.

"Next week. I'll give myself every hour's grace I can. Something may happen, but it's a forlorn hope."

"Then we shall lose you and your vast store of knowledge, and I shall be free from your rebuking tongue. But I'm truly sorry, Duncan, that you

"WHERE ARE YOUR RINGS, MADELINE?" HE CRIED SHARPLY.

are in trouble. I really wouldn't have embraced my gain at your loss—premeditatively."

She held out her jeweled fingers and laughed joyously. The piled up gems that flashed under Harding's tired eyes were no more heartless than their beautiful owner, he thought savagely. Selfish as he had always believed her, he was yet stunned by her indifference. He had been George Rives' closest friend and had promised him on his deathbed six years before to keep a watchful eye over his mother, a gracious, delicate woman of fifty, and his sister Madeline, a willful beauty of sixteen.

Because she loved diamonds Madeline had promptly put one half of her patrimony on coming of age into numerous rings to adorn her slender, tapering, pink nailed fingers. The other half was tied up so she could not handle it or she would have weighted her toes with them, too, Harding declared in disgust when he saw her investment. The Riveses were comfortably fixed, but it was only by careful financiering and good management that mother and daughter could live in the comparative luxury they did. Mrs. Rives spoiled Madeline as only a doting mother can, but then every one, save Harding, took a hand at spoiling Madeline. She was so very lovely and so irresistibly sweet despite the selfishness Harding so greatly deplored.

Harding was hurt. He ignored the jeweled fingers and strode angrily toward her mother, who was approaching from the other end of the wide, comfortable veranda. Madeline's smile was enigmatical as she gazed at the big, broad shouldered figure towering above her mother and openly disdainful at his whispered command on leaving.

"Don't tell your mother. She's unselfish enough to care."

Mrs. Rives looked at Madeline disapprovingly as Harding tramped angrily down the long walk.

"Why will you persist in quarreling with Duncan?" she rebuked gently. "No brother could be kinder."

"I don't like paragons," said Madeline shortly. "It does him good to be disagreed with once in awhile and to lose his temper. He should be grateful to me, and"—

"He's not," concluded her mother impressively. She shook her head sadly. She had hoped things would be different between Duncan and Madeline. As day after day passed and Duncan

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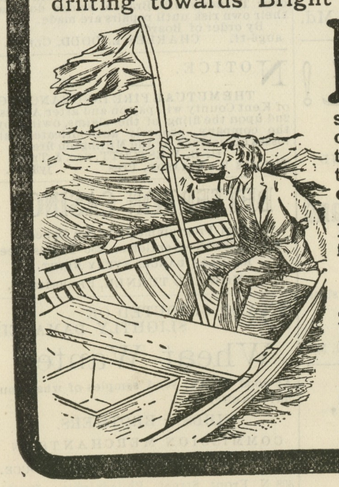

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